

GOA

A Retreat for All Seasons

WORDS/Isabel Putinja

ONCE the realm of hippies and backpackers, Goa is increasingly becoming a luxury destination catering to the sophisticated traveller, offering exclusive holiday hideaways, designer shops and some of India's best restaurants.

Goa's heritage architecture, unique culture and cuisine – remnants of 451 years of Portuguese rule – make it a unique destination which is distinctly different to the rest of India. Today, India's smallest state is the country's biggest tourist destination, but it is still possible to find quiet beaches, enchanted gardens and hilltop hideaways if you know where to look.

Offering more than just sun, sand and sea, each season highlights one of Goa's many splendours, making this a true year-round destination.

The Perfect Beach Hideaway

The peak season for beach lovers is November to March when the days are sunny and dry. With many beaches becoming increasingly congested, *Elsewhere* is the perfect hideaway for those looking for peace and privacy. Located on a spit of private beachfront naturally isolated between the ocean and a salt-water creek, Elsewhere is one of the most unique and exclusive places to stay in Goa.

Privacy is perhaps the ultimate luxury and here it is of utmost importance, for Elsewhere's high profile guests include famous authors, royal families and Bollywood and Hollywood stars. This is where Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie holidayed with their kids. So important is privacy that Elsewhere's exact location is kept secret, revealed only at the time of booking.

A bamboo footbridge leads across the creek and into what seems like another world. This slice of paradise belongs to Denzil Sequiera, a photographer who inherited it from his uncle. He could have easily cashed in on the tourism boom and sold out to developers. Instead he decided to preserve this small piece of 'real' Goa. He has saved not only the old colonial-style houses, and pristine undeveloped beachfront but also the natural habitat of the local wildlife.

The ambience is one of rustic charm and untamed nature. Four old beach houses have been lovingly and tastefully restored offering all necessary comforts with no added frills (these are not needed). There's no room service, but each house has a refrigerator full of drinks, and delicious home-cooked meals are served in the delightful open-air dining area. ▷



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open-air lounges on covered terraces are the perfect spot to watch the rains from among the treetops.

Coco Shambhala is the creation of Giles Knapton, an Englishman who has made Goa his home for many years. Designed to be a luxury 'home away from home', each 2-bedroom villa has a fully-equipped kitchen and private plunge pool. Rainy days will never be a bore with the iPod docks, flat-screen TVs with cable, and DVD players provided. Each villa has a full-time maid available as well as a car and driver - and a 24-hour concierge service is available, as is everything else that will ensure a relaxing holiday.

A Slice of Goan Village Life

Siolim - on the banks of the Chapora river - is a charming village of beautiful, old Portuguese-style villas and gardens of bougainvillea. Many of these heritage homes have been converted into elegant hotels. One of the most recent is *Ishavilas*, an old, eccentric villa set in a beautiful tropical garden filled with fountains, sculptures and tropical flowers.

Belonging to the Bajaj family and managed by the Neemrana Group of 'non-hotels', the whole villa is available for rent in the peak season. At other times, the three-bedrooms and separate suite are available on a daily basis.

Choose the Oriental suite by the pool for privacy, or the Kailash suite which opens to a pleasant covered seating area in the garden. The on-site spa offers Ayurvedic treatments, and relaxing massages and yoga classes are held in the yoga shala. This is the ideal place for those who like to spend some quiet time in an inspiring and relaxing atmosphere. ▶

At Elsewhere you feel like a privileged guest at a friend's summer hideaway. The private beach is almost empty, but if you wanted to venture off the beach staff can arrange a morning trip to see dolphins on The Solita (a luxury yacht), or a romantic dinner cruise at sunset. The yacht can also be chartered on a daily basis for longer trips to see the 18th century Tiracol Fort, the magnificent cathedrals and churches of Old Goa; a UNESCO World Heritage site; and the charming capital of Goa, Panjim.

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The tropical jungle-style setting of Coco Shambhala provides the perfect backdrop for an exclusive 'monsoon escape'

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Elsewhere, located between the ocean and a salt-water Creek is the perfect beach hideaway

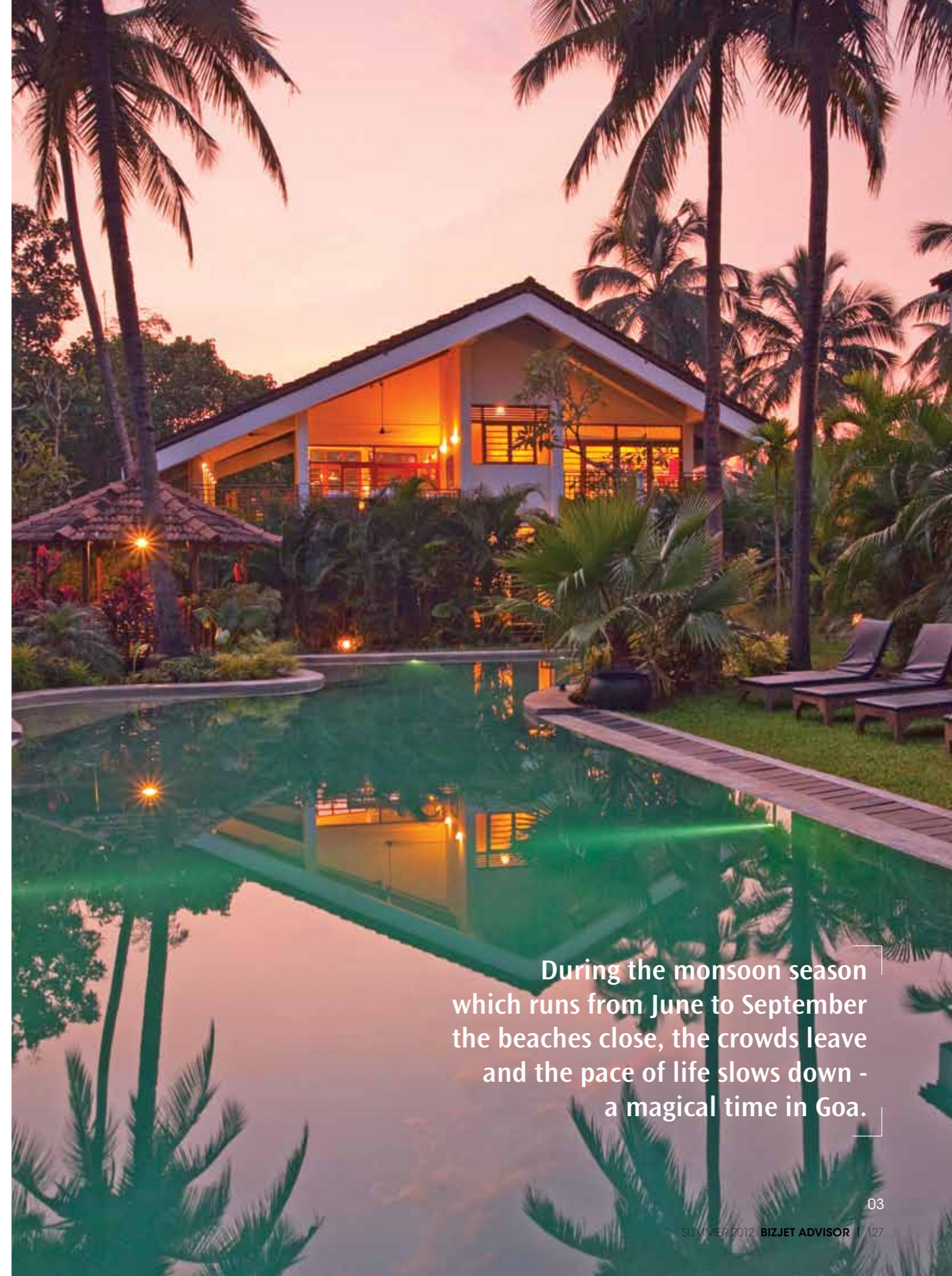
Escape to a Tropical Garden

During the monsoon season which runs from June to September the beaches close, the crowds leave and the pace of life slows down - a magical time in Goa. The landscape becomes a verdant green, temperatures drop and the marvellous smell of fresh earth creeps up after the rains.

The tropical jungle-style garden setting at *Coco Shambhala* in Nerul is the perfect backdrop for a monsoon escape. This small and exclusive property has four spacious and comfortable contemporary-style villas set around an inviting pool. The cosy



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Head to the Hills

For someone who loves the hills and a constant breeze, *Nilaya Hermitage's* hill-top location near Arpora is perfect. From here there is a stunning view of Goa's coastal plains, and the ocean can be seen glittering in the distance.

Built of the deep red-coloured laterite rock found all over Goa, the ambience here is one of an 'earthy' and stylish ashram. Designed by fashion stylist Claudia Derain, her engineer husband Hari Ajwani and local architect Dean d'Cruz, this chic boutique resort set in 20 acres of leafy grounds has 11 eccentrically-decorated rooms with names like fire, sun, air, earth and moon.

Nilaya is a favourite with celebrities, with Kate Moss, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Mick Jagger, George Harrison and Richard Gere all reported to have stayed here.

Local and Global Culinary Delights

Goa has many first-rate restaurants serving up a variety of local and international cuisines. *La Plage* on Ashvem Beach has taken the typical Goan beach shack to a new level of fine dining. The menu is 5-star, and the setting casual beach-chic - including simple tables and deck chairs arranged in the sand among a cluster of palm trees.

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La Plage is run by a French trio who have perfected the recipe for success. Chef Morgan Rainforth has created a menu of culinary delights featuring mainly seafood dishes prepared à la Française, but with a few exciting twists. The chilled pea and cucumber soup with mint is a delight, and the tomato and basil sorbet - served with the superb grilled mussels with parsley - a culinary revelation.

Another wildly popular dinner destination is *Thalassa*. Part of its success is its location: Perched on a cliff top, there are stunning sunset views of Vagator beach. Then there is the superb Greek cuisine served up by *Mariketty from Corfu*: From tztziki to spanakopita, moussaka to souvlaki, this is a true Greek taverna. The home-made feta cheese is a favourite, while the small shops at the entrance are worth a browse, especially the boho-chic



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designer-wear in light, colourful fabrics by Italian stylist Martino Caramia at *Flame*.

In Candolim is *Bomra's*, another trendy eatery with a cosy open-air terrace. UK-trained chef Bawmra Jap is from Burma and has taken his homeland's cuisine and infused it with other regional Asian influences. Try the moghinga, a Burmese fish soup of rice vermicelli, boiled egg, fish cake and gourd fritter. Celebrated writer and Goa-regular Amitav Ghosh has declared that Jap serves the best Burmese food he has ever had.

Other firm favourites we cannot fail to mention include the al-fresco Indo-French restaurant *Le Poisson Rouge* on the Baga River, the sophisticated *Sublime* (which is moving to Morjim) and *J&A's* for Italian food in Baga. For authentic Goan food, the locals swear that *Mum's Kitchen* in Panjim and *Amigo's* in Nerul serve up the best.

Beach Boutiques and Shopping

Just next to the *La Plage* restaurant on Ashvem beach is a small row of designer shops housed in beach shacks. *Jade Jagger*, who spends part of the year living in Goa, has opened a beachside boutique of her designer-wear and signature jewellery. Next door is *Beach Candy* with a smart collection of kaftans, dresses, bags and accessories.

Behind *La Plage* restaurant is its own boutique which is worth a browse, and next door, housed under a luxury tent, is *The Shop by Nani Ki*. This is a branch of Danielle and Chloe Le Bonnois' chic Paris boutique with beach fashions and accessories, and an adorable collection of Indo-Western wear for kids.

The Saturday Night Market in Arpora is a shopping highlight not to be missed. Arrive just after opening at 6:30pm to avoid the crowds or after 9:30pm when the festive atmosphere reaches its peak. There are over 500 stalls selling clothes and accessories, jewellery, textiles, brassware, art and handicrafts, as well as food such as momos, sushi and Belgian waffles. Cocktail bars and live music keep the party going until late. >



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1,2. An ambience of 'earthy' and stylish ashram, and some exceptional views of Goa's coastal plains can be enjoyed from Nilaya Hermitage

3,4. Ishavilas is best suited for those seeking a quiet retreat in an inspiring and relaxing environment



Enjoy Goa's offshore wildlife on a private yacht excursion

GOA TRAVEL INFORMATION

ADDRESSES

- ↳ **Elsewhere**, Mandrem Beach, North Goa. www.aseascape.com
 - ↳ **Coco Shambhala**, Patrimonio, Nerul, Bardez, Goa 403 113. www.cocoshambhala.com
 - ↳ **Ishavilas**, 103, Vaddy, Siolim, Goa 430 517. www.ishavilasgoa.com
 - ↳ **Nilaya Hermitage**, Arpora, Goa 403 518. www.nilaya.com
- Tourist Board of India**
www.tourism.gov.in

JET CHARTER COMPANIES

- www.aircharter-international.com
- www.airchartermideast.ae
- www.ajaprivatejets.com
- www.arrowaircraft.com
- www.chocksawaycharter.com
- www.comluxaviation.com
- www.deccanair.com
- www.execujet.net
- www.gamagroup.com
- www.jetaviation.com
- www.prestige-jet.com
- www.religarevoyages.com
- www.royaljetgroup.com
- www.vistajet.com

FLYING TO GOA BY PRIVATE JET

Those travelling by private jet will land at Goa's Dabolim airport. All private jet flights into Dabolim have to be completed by 4pm local time. All of the Villa companies mentioned can arrange transfers by chauffeured car.

APPROXIMATE FLIGHT DISTANCES TO GOA BY PRIVATE JET

- Mumbai - 412.31km
- Delhi - 1513.70km
- Dubai - 2220.79km
- Abu Dhabi - 2268.74km
- Jakarta - 4348.63km
- Bangkok - 2869.98km
- Singapore - 3632.54km
- Kuala Lumpur - 3334.69km
- Bahrain - 3198.56km

NB: Flight times will vary according to size of jet, number of passengers, seasons and weather variations. Please contact your jet management company or a jet charter company for more information on these.



Visit the Saturday Night Market for a vibrant, colourful experience



Sample spice and variety in the Goan Cuisine